

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 01425 311534Z

12
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----- 125970

R 310856Z JAN 76
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9319
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY RABAT

S E C R E T MOSCOW 1425

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UR, MO, US, AG
SUBJECT: MOSCOW AND THE MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN CONFLICT

REF: STATE 01496, ALGIERS 0169, RABAT 0413

1. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION. ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE THAT AT PRESENT THE BASIC SOVIET INTEREST IN THE SAHARAN CONFLICT IS TO AVOID ENTANGLEMENT IN THE QUARREL, THERE EXIST ATTRACTIONS FOR DEEP INVOLVEMENT WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY BECOME IRRESISTIBLE. WE SUGGEST THAT U.S. INTERESTS MIGHT BE WELL SERVED IF WE POINTED OUT TO THE SOVIETS THAT THE SITUATION IS POTENTIALLY UNSTABLE, AND THAT WE HOPE THE DISPUTE CAN BE RESOLVED WITHIN A REGIONAL CONTEXT, WITHOUT GREAT POWER INTERFERENCE.

2. TO DATE, THE SOVIET UNION HAS TAKEN A VERY CAUTIOUS AND LOW-KEY APPROACH TO THE FAR-OFF DISPUTE OVER THE SAHARA. MOSCOW HAS ATTEMPTED TO ASSUME A NEUTRAL PUBLIC STANCE, AND HAS AVOIDED AN OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT (SPECIFIC OR IMPLIED) OF EITHER PARTY'S POSITION. HOWEVER, THE LIMITED PRESS COVERAGE WHICH HAS APPEARED HAS REFLECTED A MEASURABLE "TILT" TOWARD ALGERIA WHICH COULD EVOLVE INTO ACTIVE SUPPORT SHOULD THE SITUATION DETERIORATE INTO ACTUAL HOSTILITIES.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 01425 311534Z

3. MOSCOW'S INCLINATIONS IN A PINCH WERE DEMONSTRATED BY THE USSR'S SUPPORT FOR ALGIERS IN THE UN VOTE (PROBABLY IN RESPONSE TO BOUMEDIENNE'S LETTERS, ALTHOUGH THE SOVIETS CLAIM THEY WOULD HAVE VOTED THIS WAY IN ANY CASE). AT THE SAME TIME, MOSCOW RESPONDED REMARKABLY MILDLY TOWARD RABAT DURING THE SHIP SEIZURE EPISODE, AND IN ADDITION THE USSR HAS SIGNED ANOTHER TRADE AGREEMENT WITH MOROCCO. MOREOVER, MEDIA REACTION TO THE RECENT CLASH AT AMGALI HAS BEEN SUBDUED, DEVOID OF SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTARY, AND GENERALLY FINELY BALANCED, ALTHOUGH AGAIN THERE WAS SLIGHTLY MORE COLUMN INCHES DEVOTED TO REPORTS FROM ALGIERS AND THE GIST OF THE ARTICLES WAS FAVORABLE TO THE ALGERIANS. THE ARAB MEDIATION EFFORT HAS ALSO BEEN STRESSED, PROBABLY REFLECTING MOSCOW'S DESIRE TO REMAIN, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, ALOOF FROM THE DISPUTE.

4. ASIDE FROM THIS DESIRE TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH BOTH SIDES, MOSCOW'S CAUTIOUS APPROACH CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS OTHER --PERHAPS MORE BASIC-- CONSIDERATIONS. WE WOULD AGREE WITH THE ASSESSMENT OF EMBASSIES RABAT AND ALGIERS THAT THE SOVIETS POSSESS LITTLE PROSPECT FOR INFLUENCING THE COURSE OF EVENTS, AND WE THINK THE KREMLIN PERCEIVES THIS CLEARLY. ADDITIONALLY, IN THE NEAR TERM, MOSCOW APPEARS TO HAVE LITTLE TO GAIN AND SOMETHING TO LOSE IN TERMS OF RELATIONS WITH BOTH SIDES BY INJECTING ITSELF IN ANY ACTIVE WAY INTO THIS PARTICULAR QUARREL.

5. ON THE OTHER HAND, SOVIET REGIONAL INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND MEDITERRANEAN ARE SUBSTANTIAL, AND THE KREMLIN'S PREDILECTION FOR VIEWING SEEMINGLY PERIPHERAL DISPUTES AS ELEMENTS OF A LARGER PICTURE COULD PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT MOTIVATION FOR MORE DIRECT ACTION. MOREOVER, THE SOVIETS FIND IT DIFFICULT TO RESIST TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY, ESPECIALLY WHEN SUCH TARGETS ARE THRUST UPON THEM. IDEOLOGY TOO, AS ANGOLA DEMONSTRATES, CAN PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN THE KREMLIN'S POLICY-MAKING PROCESS, AND ITS "INTERNATIONALIST DUTY" TO SUPPORT NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS (NLM) COULD PROVE A POWERFUL ATTRACTION TO

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 01425 311534Z

BECOMING MORE DEEPLY INVOLVED. IN THIS REGARD, MOSCOW HAS YET TO BESTOW OFFICIAL NLM IMPRIMATUR ON THE POLISARIO FRONT, BUT SUCH A DUBBING WOULD BE ONE MEANINGFUL SIGNAL OF MOSCOW'S INCREASED INTEREST.

6. NEVERTHELESS, ON BALANCE WE THINK THE SOVIETS WANT TO REMAIN FREE OF THE SPANISH SAHARA TARBABY, AND WILL PROBABLY BE CONTENT TO STRESS THE ARAB MEDIATION EFFORT

AS A JUST MEANS TO REACH A SOLUTION SATISFACTORY TO EVERYONE. SHOULD SERIOUS HOSTILITIES BREAK OUT, HOWEVER, THE DECIDING FACTOR WOULD PROBABLY BE MOSCOW'S RELUCTANCE TO PURSUE ANY POLICY WHICH WOULD JEOPARDIZE ITS REASONABLY SOLID RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA. CONSIDERATIONS SUCH AS SIMILAR IDEOLOGICAL OUTLOOKS, A LONG-STANDING MILITARY SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP, AND THE ENTREE INTO NORTH AFRICA AND THE "NON-ALIGNED" WORLD WHICH ALGERIA PROVIDES, FAR OUTWEIGH SOVIET INTEREST IN MOROCCAN PHOSPHATES OR A LONG-TERM DESIRE TO DISPLACE WESTERN INFLUENCE IN MOROCCO. BEFORE MAKING THE FINAL LEAP, HOWEVER, MOSCOW CONCEIVABLY COULD MOUNT A MEDIATION EFFORT OF ITS OWN USING THE INDO-PAKISTAN TASHKENT PRECEDENT AS A MODEL.

7. THUS, THE SAHARA IMBROGLIO COULD POSSIBLE BE DESCRIBED AS A "PRE-ANGOLA" SITUATION, ALTHOUGH IT HAS CLEARLY NOT YET EVOLVED TO THE STAGE DESCRIBED BY KING HASSAN (THIRD REF). ALTHOUGH OUR VANTAGE POINT IS A DISTANT ONE, IT STRIKES US THAT THIS MAY BE AN OPPORTUNE TIME TO POINT OUT TO THE SOVIETS THE DESIRABILITY OF KEEPING THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THIS DISPUTE OUT OF THE SPHERE OF SUPERPOWER POLITICS AND OF REFRAINING FROM ANY ACTIONS WHICH WOULD EXACERBATE TENSIONS OR FURTHER IMPERIL AN ALREADY FRAYED DETENTE RELATIONSHIP.
STOESSEL

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WAR, FOREIGN RELATIONS, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MOSCOW01425
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760037-0964
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976012/aaaaabby.tel
Line Count: 141
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 STATE 1496, 76 ALGIERS 169, 76 RABAT 413
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 MAY 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <01 SEP 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MOSCOW AND THE MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN CONFLICT
TAGS: PFOR, UR, MO, US, AG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006